The Black Cat

AUGUST 1907

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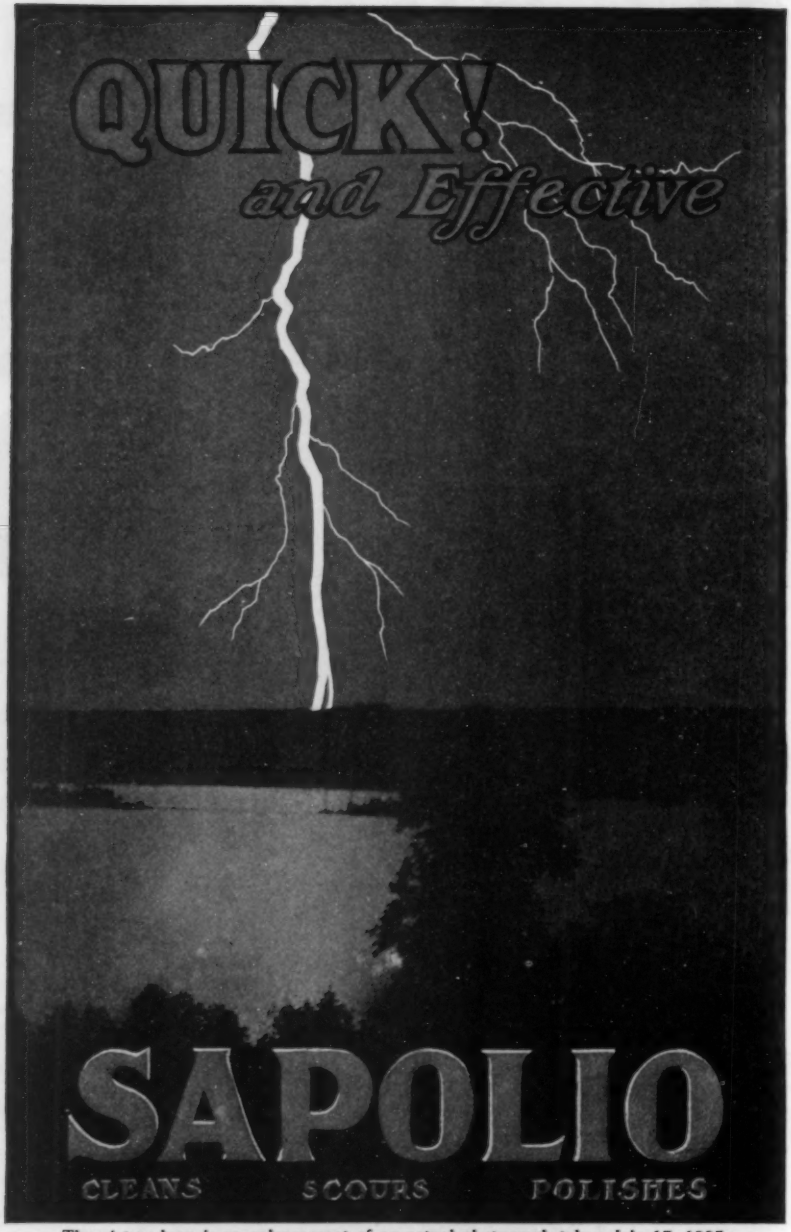

The picture-base is an enlargement of an actual photograph taken July 17, 1905, at Lake Cobbossecontee, Winthrop, Me., by Mr. Lewis C. James, Cambridge, Mass.

The Black Cat

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The Beetle of the Mandarin.*

BY VERA L. CONNOLLY.

JOHN HARRIMAN, American consul at Shanghai, lay back in his chair and stretched his feet toward the blaze.

Without, the snow fell ceaselessly. Its large whirling flakes settled on the sedan chairs, the wheels of the rickshas and the shoulders of the coolies.

The tall buildings beyond the consulate grounds were outlined in soft, gleaming white. A large covered chair, held by three coolies, was carried up the path to the door of the consulate.

Harriman aroused himself as one coolie entered with lights and another announced the presence of the great Lu Luang. The ceremony of greeting over with, the old mandarin seated himself and drew his chair to the fire.

The consul waited courteously for him to explain his errand, but the old man remained silent, his eyes fixed on the leaping flames.

His robe of gray silk, fur-lined and embroidered in gold and scarlet butterflies, caught the light and shimmered with each movement. It surpassed anything the American had ever seen.

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"We are having bad weather," ventured the consul.

"Yes. Shanghai is wrapped in snow, while Canton is gay with butterflies and flowers. But what can we expect? Is this not China?" With an expressive wave of the hand.

The young consul, comprehending the Chinese character, and knowing the old mandarin well, waited for him to continue the conversation. At last the other turned slowly, and fixed his black eyes on the consul's face.

"I have come to ask you a favor. I very seldom ask favors."

Harriman bowed. "I place myself at your service," he replied, courteously.

The mandarin spoke quietly.

"I have traced the jewels."

"Ah! that is good news. And you have found the thief?" The American looked up with interest.

"There was no thief," Lu Luang spoke quietly.

"What! No thief!"

"I say they were not stolen."

The consul hid his surprise as best he could. Lu Luang looked languidly around him.

"We are alone?"

"Certainly."

"Then I shall explain. For my own reasons it was best to report them stolen. They *were* taken away — by the thieving hands of Lu Luang. Do you follow me?"

The consul bowed gravely. "You have sold them?"

"Yes, I needed a great deal of money. Work is impossible for a Chinese nobleman. I therefore was forced to sell the jewels of my ancestors to obtain this sum. I shall some day recover them. They are safe. They brought to me a vast sum."

"Undoubtedly." At this juncture the servant entered with liqueurs, and after he had departed the old man continued.

"By mistake our household token and treasure, the beetle of the house of Luang, was sold with the lot. It is a small piece of feather jewelry, in itself almost valueless, but necessary to the welfare of our family. As I knew not that it was kept with the jewels, I did not miss it. The fury of the gods has descended upon us. My son is dying. The beetle must be recovered."

Harriman rose with an expression of sympathy, and crossing over to the old mandarin, stood before him.

"Cannot the physicians help your son?"

The old Chinaman shook his head. "Medical help can do nothing for him. The token must be recovered. It was a gift of the gods to my forefathers. We have provoked their anger, and my son's life is dependent on their good pleasure."

The dignity and sincerity of the stately old man deeply impressed the American.

"Can't you recover the emblem from the purchaser of your jewels?"

"No, he has sold it. But wait. I do know where it is. He sold it to the mandarin, Gum Sag Lee. He, in turn, has placed it in the hands of Song Wen, the auctioneer, in Canton, to be sold at auction in four days."

"Can't you buy it back before the auction takes place?"

"No. Song Wen has been instructed not to sell the jewel to me. Gum Sag Lee will publicly buy it back at the auction. That will clear him of any underhand method of acquiring it."

"Can't you over-bid him?"

"No. My tael are few. His are many. I am an old man. He will succeed me, if my son lives not. My son's life is dependent on the recovery of the beetle. Don't you understand?"

"Yes. He must be stopped. Why not appeal to the law?"

"No, no. It must never be known that the jewels of the house of Luang were sold. It would mean everlasting disgrace."

"Is there no way?"

"Yes. I think there is one way; if you will recover it for me. At my approach all signs of it would be hidden. I must pretend ignorance of its whereabouts. You, a foreigner and a stranger to Canton, could enter the shop where the things are exhibited and, seeing it, offer to purchase it. Will you do this for me?"

The American stretched out his hand. "I am glad I can do something for you. It will not inconvenience me in the least, as I had planned to run up to Canton on Monday. How much shall I offer for it?"

The mandarin drew a purse from his sleeve and handed it to the consul.

"It is all I have. If necessary use the last tael." He rose as he spoke and walked to the door. His coolies were summoned, and soon his chair was in readiness.

He drew the consul back into the hall and embraced him.

"My good friend," he said, "from to-morrow morning the Chang Road is open to American merchants. Good-bye."

"Thank you, Luang. Good-bye."

The consul stood watching the chair until it disappeared behind the trees. Then his careworn face lighted up.

"I am very glad. No more driving through the old cemetery. The fever will be greatly lessened this summer."

He closed the door and went back to his study to arrange his affairs for the morning start.

Four days later, in the early morning, a little steamer nosed her way up the Pearl River toward the city of Canton.

The river was alive with boats and noisy with gabble of rival merchants as they poled their cumbersome junks through the throngs of house-boats, for which Canton is famous. These consisted of sampans roofed over in one place by a matting, and indescribably dirty. They were usually propelled by women and children, while their lords and masters smoked luxuriously in the stern.

John Harriman stood on the steamer's deck, watching them shove from under the boat's prow barely in time to escape being swamped. They closed the steamer in on either side as a huge ice pack might. Scarce a square foot of water could be seen between them.

Occasional splotches of color marked the progress of a flower-boat, for these heathenish relics of former days are still to be seen on the Pearl River. The whole scene was full of life. Even the boats themselves, with their carefully painted eyes, their graceful prows and flapping sails, resembled huge brown birds.

Soon the endless string of houseboats gave place to a long wharf, from which narrow, irregular streets ran back, lined on either side by shops, on through the old city of the dead to the great Tartar Wall — this was Canton.

As the steamer made fast to the pier amid a great clanging of bells and cries of chair-men, the coolies poured from the lower

deck, and soon the consul's chair was in readiness for him. He gave a few directions and the coolies trotted up the principal street, which was so narrow that the hangings of the chairs almost brushed the shops on either side.

Overhead the roofs jutted out to within a few inches of each other, making the street look like a narrow hallway. The shops were open to the street, and their owners could be seen within, arranging their display, or seated beside their counters, smoking. In the meat shops, rats, ducks and chou-dogs, dried and cured, were strung from the ceiling.

Everywhere the American's chair was followed by sulky, scowling glances. Once, meeting another chair, the consul's coolies were forced to back into a neighboring shop in order that the others could pass.

After twenty minutes of such travel, the chair halted before a shop more pretentious than most of them, and presided over by a large Chinaman, who hurried to the door as the consul entered.

"I am honored. How can I serve you?" He bowed deeply before the American.

Harriman glanced at the bare little shop in surprise.

"I must have made a mistake. I am searching for Song Wen, the auctioneer."

"I am he."

"I wish to see the articles to be sold at Wednesday's auction."

"Certainly. Follow me." Song drew aside a hanging at the back of the shop and they passed into a long room, dimly lighted by two brass lamps suspended from above. It was crowded with furniture, brasses, cloisonné jars, ivories, fans, embroidered hangings and trays of jade and uncut stones.

The American paused in the midst of all this splendor, while the merchant lighted several lamps, which flared up brightly.

"You have heard of the ivories? No? They are very beautiful." He led the way to a large black cabinet, on which the gleaming pieces were strikingly arranged.

He picked up the carving of a tiny, half-open peach, in which a child nestled. Every feature of the infant's face was perfectly represented; the peach itself was without a flaw, and all of it was no larger than a marble.

"Beautiful!" Harriman stepped to the light and examined it. Song Wen quietly named the auction price.

"Sell it to me now?"

"No. Nothing is to be sold until the auction next Wednesday."

"I will come then."

The auctioneer smiled and led him from one fascinating heap to another. Finally he stopped at a black cabinet and, with a quick push, a secret drawer sprang out. On a silk pad glittered a half-dozen uncut stones, blue and red.

As the consul bent over the box, the purpose of his visit came back to him.

"They are certainly beautiful. But, have you no feather ornaments? I am greatly interested in the feather jewelry."

The auctioneer jerked out a large drawer with a look of disgust at such plebeian taste, and leaving the American to look them over, he turned back to close the drawer of jewels.

Harriman bent down over the ornaments eagerly. The half-light displayed a collection of pins, armlets and ear-rings. There were insects, flowers and birds, mounted in steel, and gleaming red, blue and purple.

In the very front of the drawer lay a tiny green object. He bent closer. A sharp metallic click startled him, and he straightened up. It was probably the charms on his watch chain striking against the ornaments in the drawer.

"I'll have to take them closer to the light." He moved across to the lamp and examined the contents of the drawer minutely.

The red and purple bees and butterflies stared back at him from their cushion of cotton. There was not one green ornament in the box. He uttered an exclamation of disappointment.

Going back to the cabinet he attempted to replace the drawer. It stuck, and while he was jerking at it, Song Wen came over to him.

"Never mind that. I'll replace it. Have you found anything you admire particularly?"

"No." Harriman moved to the door, carefully stepping past a pair of tall ox-blood jars, passed under the hanging and into the bare little shop, the auctioneer following.

His coolies awaited him at the door.

"You will come again? On Wednesday, perhaps?" the auctioneer asked.

"Yes. Good-day."

"Good-day." Song Wen stood bowing in the doorway until the chair had turned a sharp corner and the last coolie disappeared. Then he entered the shop and passed under the hanging into the long, dark room. The tray lay as he had left it a moment before. He carried it to the light and began to arrange the articles on the cotton pad.

Suddenly he jumped back, his olive face paling. "The green beetle! It is not here. I am ruined! I am ruined!"

He stood there a minute, mumbling to himself. Then, calling to a coolie, he hurried into the shop and on down the street, calling excitedly as he ran.

Meanwhile, John Harriman lay back on his cushions, tired and disappointed. He had failed to obtain the one tiny object on which the health of all the American residents of Shanghai had rested. For he knew well that in case he did not recover the beetle Lu Luang would again close the Chang Road to American merchants. Again they would be compelled to use the old Cemetery Road, in which fever was always lurking for its prey.

Suddenly a shrill cry came from behind him somewhere; then a babel of voices; then the sound of a crowd of people running.

"Fire," he thought. Leaning from the car he called to the coolies, "Hurry up."

They began to run. It was a dangerous proceeding in Canton. As the heavy chair lumbered through the streets, the Chinese ran to their doors, scowling.

He leaned from the window and looked out. The wharf lay directly ahead. He breathed a sigh of relief. Just then the cries from behind became clearer.

"Thief — Stealer — Red-haired devil — the green eyes! There he is. Yahai!" He looked back. A terrifying sight met his eyes.

Around the corner behind him swung a Chinese mob, with faces distorted, howling as they ran, and pointing at him.

"Yahai! Give us the green beetle. Stealer!" At sight of his face the cries broke out afresh.

"Stealer. Kill him!"

He sank back, weak and sick. These men were accusing him of some imaginary theft that they might mob him and steal what money they could find in his clothes. Arguing with them were worse than useless. The desire to kill had made beasts of them. Most of them did not even know what they were running for.

If they searched him they would find that vast sum he had in his purse, and which he could never repay to Lu Luang.

No. He must make the steamer. The chair was swaying back and forth, striking the shop signs on either side, and sending them spinning. He looked ahead. The steamer still lay at the dock, not two blocks away.

Suddenly there came a blinding crash, and he was thrown forward on his face. The chair was motionless.

He leaped out. His coolies were running down the street. They had deserted him. Behind came the mob. A huge man holding a knife was almost upon him.

"Stealer. Kill!"

Turning, he ran down the street. Behind him he heard his pursuers, as their wooden shoes clattered on the rough cobbles. He heard their insane howling. "Kill. Yahai! Kill!"

He shuddered and ran faster, his head down and his arms swinging.

Crashing suddenly into someone approaching, he fell to the ground. He struggled to his feet and ran on down the narrow street past open shops, stumbling over the cobbles.

Still the cries behind grew nearer and nearer. He looked up. There lay the steamer, beyond the next corner. It had not gone yet. He must make it.

"Kill!" Something struck him in the arm and glanced off. He stooped, picked up the knife, and plunged on again.

His breath was coming in gasps. His limbs felt dull and heavy. As he passed the last corner, he staggered across the square to the line of chairs and rickshas. If only these men did not stop him he would be safe.

But the cries from behind had preceded him. A couple of ricksha men sprang at him. He dodged them only to meet a third. Striking out right and left with his knife, he ran on.

The steamer rail was lined with anxious faces. "Be quick, man! For God's sake, be quick." He reeled across the wharf and stretched out his arms. They dragged him on board and the steamer put out into the stream.

Just in time. A rain of missiles caused the passengers to flee in terror to the other side of the boat.

The infuriated mob, reaching the vessel a second too late, sprang into the houseboats. Leaping from one to the other, they attempted to scale the sides of the steamer. Failing of this, they aimed knives at the windows, and the crashing of glass, mingled with their cries and curses, were the last sounds to be heard as the little steamer pursued its way up the river.

After John Harriman had been taken to his cabin and made comfortable, the passengers left him to rest. He tossed back and forth restlessly, too tired to sleep.

"My! But that was a close shave! That confounded bug has caused more trouble than a nest of spiders. I wonder what time it is?"

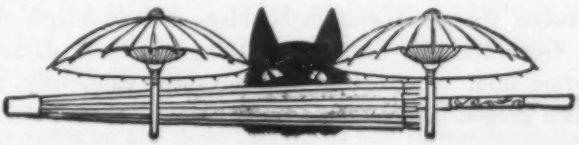
He reached over to where his clothes lay piled on a chair by the berth and drew out his watch with its dangling charms.

"I say confound the thing." He dropped the watch on the bed with a cry of dismay. "Am I losing my senses over it?"

He sat up again, his eyes starting from his head. For there, stuck tight to a toy magnet suspended from his chain, and blinking at him with its round, beady eyes, was a tiny green beetle.

He stared at it a minute longer. Then, throwing himself back against the pillows, he burst into a roar of laughter:

"They had a right to chase me. I *am* a red-haired stealer with green eyes, after all."



The Death of Kalu's Hand.*

BY CYRIL ETHERIDGE.

THE fierce African sun had set and the short tropical twilight deepened into gloom before the trial was over. At length the chief spoke.

"We have treated the white man as a friend and a brother. He has come and gone amongst us and no man hath said him nay. We have given him of our lands and of our flocks and herds, and he hath betrayed us into the hands of his kind. Brothers, what shall be his doom? Kibaru, do you speak first!"

A gray-bearded man gazed for some moments at the white twitching face before him. "Let him die the death of Kalu's hand," he said at length.

"Aye, aye," exclaimed the others, "Kibaru has it, the death of Kalu's hand."

"So be it," said the chief, "take him to the shrine of rock. So Kalu shall be appeased."

And so through the darkness John Marsden was hurried out of the village towards the river along the faint streak of a forest track just visible in the darkness. Presently the party reached a stockaded enclosure, within which the black outline of the temple was dimly shaped. Long as he had gone to and fro amongst these men, and well as he knew their ways and customs, this was new ground to him. The shrine was sacred and it was death for any but a believer to enter, but the white-faced captive in their midst was already a dead man in their eyes.

The guards and their prisoner ascended the narrow track winding between the giant granite boulders and at length they halted. In front Marsden could see nothing but black darkness yawning before him. One of the men advanced cautiously, and kneeling down groped before him.

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"Inkoos, here is the ladder."

"Descend first, two of you, and then let the white man follow you."

So, with sinking heart and one last look into the black night, Marsden followed down the rough steps, till they stood on the floor of the cavern.

Again Kibaru spoke. "Listen, white man, whom we have treated as a brother. This is the shrine of Kalu, the god of the river. See," he said, pointing upwards, "he is there watching you. Tomorrow's sun will show him to you in his might. Day and night, and night and day, you will watch his hand, until you shall see — what you shall see. You shall live many hours until his wrath is appeased, for though he is very sure, he strikes but slowly. This is Kalu's will and the fate of the traitor. Farewell, white man, whom we shall see no more."

The others followed him in silence as he retraced his steps upwards, and presently Marsden heard the creaking and groaning of the heavy ladder, as it was laboriously pulled up the face of the rocky wall. Then silence fell and he was alone.

For some minutes the man remained where he was, peering anxiously around him. Black clouds obscured the moon and little but darkness was visible. He had heard much of the fiendish and loathsome cruelties of the Nyangwe tribe and he knew that his fate would be terrible, but what? How would Kalu strike?

Underfoot the floor was damp and slippery, and all around were apparently dark and dank walls. A faint drip, drip caught his ear, and poisonous exhalations of stagnant muddy ooze seemed to rise from the ground. Cautiously he left the wall and took a few steps slowly forwards. Suddenly his right foot met nothing but the empty air, and with a jerk he threw himself instinctively backwards just in time. In front of him yawned an open pit, and he crawled, trembling, back to the wall. He drank sparingly of the pitcher of water, replacing it carefully against the side, and lay down. It was no use experimentalizing in Kalu's shrine in the darkness.

Well, it had certainly been a terrible piece of bad luck. For many years he had gone backwards and forwards trading amongst these men, and had prospered. What the chief had said was

quite right; they had treated him well and fairly, and he was free to come and go. Then had come rumors of trouble and war. From the open veldt and rolling prairies of the southwest tanned, hardy, long-limbed men on wiry horses had begun to press forward into the native territory. At length came the day when white and black stood face to face, and the clash of arms could no longer be averted. Marsden considered the situation long and anxiously. He would not raise his hand against the savage, who had treated him so well, by leading against him the white man, who had come to conquer. The simplest way out of the difficulty was to clear out and take no part in the quarrel, so he decided to trek southwards. Unfortunately, as night fell on his second day's march he had ridden into a small mounted party of whites, who had pushed on some few miles ahead of the main body, and he had halted the night with them, but he stoutly refused to act as guide, in spite of their entreaties.

Chief Umbopu's intelligence department was of the very best and he was speedily informed of the raid. Collecting his warriors he fell secretly and speedily on the venturesome little band. Taken completely by surprise and attacked in overwhelming force, but few escaped. The remainder met with the short shrift of the sharp assegai. Only one prisoner was spared — John Marsden. They took care to take him alive.

Appearances were certainly against him, and in vain he protested his innocence. On previous occasions he had always informed the chief of his intended trading journeys to the south. This time, after secretly settling his affairs, he had stolen out like a thief in the night, and was caught red-handed with arms in his hands fighting in the ranks of the white men. It was hardly surprising that his trial was short, sharp and decisive, and his fate — well, he would soon see. At any rate, there was no good losing heart; Kibaru had said he had many hours to live, and the men who had escaped would speedily tell the main body. Perhaps they would get up in time.

After a few hours' disturbed sleep he woke to find daylight struggling in through an open space in the overhanging roof of rock. Beside him on the ledge, in a wicker basket, was a fresh supply of mealie meal and a gourd of water. It was evident he

was not to be starved. He looked round anxiously in the dim light, and this is what he saw:

Around and above him the walls of a natural cavern had been straightened out until the sides were perpendicular, enclosing an irregularly shaped circular pit some fifty feet deep and as many yards across.

The whole of the pit, except a narrow ledge on which he found himself, was occupied by a steep, roughly-paved basin, at the bottom of which, about twenty feet farther below where he stood, was a stagnant pool, green with slime and thick with mud and ooze. It was down these precipitous sides he had narrowly escaped falling the previous night.

In the centre of the pool, on a rough pedestal of rock, stood the effigy of a huge figure, whose horrible face and relentless eyes were turned directly towards him. The grotesque and cruel expression heightened the significance of the pointing right hand, which was directed menacingly at the water immediately in front of him. Marsden gazed in fascinated awe at the forbidding face and anxiously followed the direction of the hand, but nothing was discernible under the foul, muddy surface. But that rigid, baleful stare was more than he could stand, and he walked hastily round the ledge to the other side of the pool.

No, there was apparently no egress anywhere. The sides were straight and above the overhanging rocks nearly met except for an oval-shaped opening on one side. Not even a monkey could have climbed out. Well, he would stay where he was. Kalu's back view was certainly preferable.

As the man brought his eyes down from the roof, he again faced the rigid stare and pointing hand. Good heavens, the figure had turned round and was still facing him. He could hardly believe his eyes. He walked slowly back to his original position, and the face and hand slowly followed him.

Marsden wiped the sweat from his face. "Day and night, and night and day, you will watch his hand, until you shall see — what you shall see." Again he followed the direction of the hand, peering white-faced into the slimy pool. At once he noticed the water had risen, and was slowly and surely rising. What was going to happen?

Of course, he had it! The river was close by. The pool communicated with it by some subterranean source. They were letting in the water, or the river was rising. They were going to drown him slowly, for the water would have to rise over twenty feet.

But no, there was more to it than that. The path round the pool was several feet lower than the foot of the pedestal, on which the figure of Kalu stood. As the water rose he would be compelled to swim to it. The sides were rough and sloping, and he could doubtless clamber up and gain the top, which seemed about six feet square. He would then be standing on the same platform as Kalu, and — immediately under the upraised arm. Ah, the death of Kalu's hand!

For twelve long hours Marsden paced the circular path, watching the rising water. At one point he detected a slight boil on the surface and a few bubbles rising, doubtless just above the entrance of the underground channel through which the pool was slowly being filled. And wherever he went that long summer's day that rigid stare and pointing hand followed him.

As darkness approached he noticed a slimy, battered-looking old log, some twenty feet long. It was evidently a portion of the trunk of a tree. Knotted, gnarled, and worm-eaten, it looked as if it had been in the water for many years. It was so saturated and water logged, that one or two knots only appeared above the level of the surface, the remainder being faintly discernible under the green scum.

Horrible as the darkness was in that loathsome cavern, the man welcomed the coming of the night that shut out the irksome scrutiny of the hideous idol. All night he lay dozing uneasily, listening to the drip from the walls. Once more in his dreams he seemed to hear the noise of the fight when he was taken prisoner. Again he heard the frenzied shouts of the troopers, the sharp crack of the rifles, again the hissing "Sgee," "Sgee," of the savage warrior, as he drove home his short stabbing spear. How vivid it seemed! Several times he awoke with a start, but only the faint drip broke the dead stillness of the cavern. The moonlight, struggling in, revealed the still pointing idol, and between its hand and himself lay the dark shadow of the log.

At gray dawn, as he turned uneasily over, his hand splashed into the water, and in an instant he was on his feet. Good heavens, how quickly it had risen; it was just lapping the edge. His time had come. He would have to swim to the pedestal and face — Kalu's hand.

He packed his meal and water gourd carefully into his coat, making a tight bundle of it with a sleeve as a loop. A few strokes with one hand would carry him across, and he could easily carry the bundle in the other clear of the water.

A few strokes only, and yet he hesitated. How foul and oily the water looked in the faint morning light, and how rank was the stagnant smell. Could a man swim in such stuff? Suppose he got entangled in weeds or sunk in the oozy slime? and he stirred the water dubiously with one foot. Stay, why not make use of the log? There it lay, quite close to him. If he could coax it by drawing the water towards the side he could straddle it and paddle himself across. That would be better than soaking himself in that evil smelling liquid. He sat down on the edge, letting first one leg and then the other gingerly into the water, and, reaching out, commenced drawing the water towards him.

What had happened? The man could hardly say, but suddenly he seemed to have received some tremendous shock, that sent him reeling and splashing over on his back with his legs in the air. White-faced, with choking heart, he scrambled hastily to his feet, staring in helpless terror from Kalu's hideous face to the log at which it was pointing. He could have almost sworn that the hand had signalled sharply, and that the log had darted straight for him. But no, it was impossible; there it lay just as it was before, heavy and water-logged, looking as if it had not moved for a hundred years.

Thoroughly unnerved with the terror of some vague, unknown danger, the nature of which he could not grasp, Marsden, with the sweat pouring down his face, straightened himself up against the wall behind him. The water had now risen half way up to his knees. He hardly noticed the basket with his daily allowance of food and water being lowered carefully down by the figure crouching over the overhanging rock. He was staring before him in growing horror. Why! Now that the growing light was begin-

ning to penetrate, he could make out not only one log, but half a dozen of them, in the water between him and Kalu's hand. Like the spokes of a wheel, they radiated in a semicircle towards him, heavy and inert. What in the name of heaven did it all mean?

Suddenly there was a sharp crack of a rifle above and the basket fell into the water on the ledge. Then the light overhead was blotted out as, with a yell of terror, a black figure, turning over and over, fell into the pool on his left, with a heavy thud, that splashed the water half way up the cliff. Shot after shot rang out, shouts and yells followed up above, but Marsden had no ears for them. He watched in helpless terror the horrible scene before him.

Like a flash the heavy inert logs sprang into life and whipped sharply round towards their prey. Half a dozen huge crocodiles, raising their hideous lengths half out of the water, launched themselves at the struggling, screaming wretch, tearing him limb from limb. Round and round the pool they surged in horrid strife, their great jaws clashing now at their victim and now at each other, churning the muddy waters into crimson foam. In the fierceness of the struggle one reptile was forced bodily on to the ledge. Half blinded by the slimy ooze flung over him, Marsden backed up against the cliff, his fingers stiffening in their frenzied grasp of the rock behind him. With difficulty he kept his footing in the waves surging over the slippery ledge. Gradually the turmoil subsided, but the heaving of the waters and the bubbles rising from below gave grim evidence of the gruesome tragedy being enacted in the black depths.

Marsden suddenly found his voice. The crocodile on the ledge, recovering from his astonishment and scenting an undisputed victim, turned his long, ugly black snout in his direction and commenced waddling, half-swimming and half-walking, towards him. Shout after shout in the frenzy of despair rang out from the cavern. A sunburnt, unshaved face and the muzzle of a rifle were protruded cautiously over the overhanging rock above. A few hastily gasped out words from below, and the contents of the rifle magazine were lodged in the reptile's body. A few minutes later a looped rope was let down, and a dozen willing arms had pulled Marsden out of Kalu's shrine.

When Marsden had fully recovered from his terrible experience he learned from a prisoner, taken in the raid, that the natives had long since noticed that this curious natural cavern was the abode of some of the crocodiles infesting the neighboring river, which communicated with it by an underground channel. Superstition, engendered by its singular formation and weird gloom, soon caused it to be considered sacred, and it was dedicated to the god of the river. The reptiles were worshipped, and their presence encouraged by feeding them.

The artificial straightening of the sides, rendering egress impossible, and the cutting of the ledge, readily adapted the pit for human sacrifice. The effigy on the rock pedestal in the centre, revolved by a simple piece of mechanism by the priests on duty, was introduced later as an afterthought to add to the horrors of the tragedy. The mental torture of the victim, seeing the water gradually rise until the crocodiles were enabled to seize him from off the ledge, or he was obliged to swim to the pedestal in the centre, can readily be imagined. The reptiles were not fed for some days before a human sacrifice.

How Ezra Kept His Trust.*

BY CORA HELM RAMSAY.

HE stopped his plow half-way down the long furrow, and removed his hat to allow the light, April breeze to play over his woolly, grizzled head. There were enough holes in the hat to insure perfect ventilation, but the removal of it served as an excuse for frequent stops and rests. The old horse, accustomed to these intervals, immediately lapsed into a doze, and his driver gazed across the rich valley farm that stretched to the edge of the Missouri River. The afternoon sun shone clear; the sky was without haze or cloud, but the scenes he saw were not the visual ones of fallow fields lying ready for the seed, of shooting grain, of reddening maples, of dark brown water that caught the sunbeams as they fell and scattered them in golden showers over its surface, but scenes of fragrant hemp fields falling under hooks swung by dusky hands to the accompaniment of song; of moonlight hunts on frosty winter nights, in the great woods on the opposite shore; of hounds leaping at the blowing of horns; of dancing figures flying past lighted windows of the now empty, deserted cabins. Next it was a picture of company arriving at the "big house" still standing there between him and the river, half hidden among the trees like the nest of a shy bird — the family mansion of his former master, Colonel Dysart. He could hear the creaking of wheels as carriages came up the drive-way under the tall cottonwoods and elms that lined its sides. He could even see himself as he stood there then, attired in his best suit, handing to the ground, with his most sweeping bow, the fair occupants of the carriages. He saw them shaking out their rustling skirts and fluttering up the broad steps to the veranda, to be received with the open-hearted hospitality of ante-bellum days. He saw them descending the wide stair-case,

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gathering in groups on the veranda, around the pillars of which clematis and roses twined, to watch the passage of steamboats up and down the river; he saw them waving their handkerchiefs to people on the decks and listening to strains of music that floated back from the vessels. How the figures crowded upon the canvas from out the shadow-land of the past! But among them all, there were none more stately than his old master when he graciously joined the young folks in a reel, more buoyant and light-hearted than his two young masters, or more handsome than his old mistress, moving serenely among her guests or bending tenderly above the flowers that bloomed in the old-fashioned garden, now filled with weeds. He lifted his hard, black hand and brushed away a mist that had come before his eyes. How changed it all was!

Hearing a noise on the road that ran close by the field, he turned and saw a young man, mounted on a horse. The young man had also stopped, and his glance had followed Ezra's across the fields. Before his eyes were scenes of Memory's limning passing, too? If so, their calm, gray depths betrayed no sign. They noted the progress of the work, and then rested for a moment on the distant river. The warming sun was starting all green things into life, but the sluggish water seemed but half-awakened from its winter's sleep.

"How slow the river is," said the young man, half to himself, and, with a wave of his hand to the old colored man, rode on. When he was out of sight, Ezra turned again toward the river.

"Marse Jim call dat ribber slow?" he muttered. "Dat's de fastest wukin' ribber eber I seed. Dat's a magick ribber, dat is. It kin swaller boats, an' houses, an' farms faster dan de man swallers fire an' knives in de circus. Dat ribber's jest playin' possum now, an' ef Marse Jim don't look out, it'll swaller him, swaller him an' de lan' too, but I'll stick to it — I'll stick to de lan' ez long ez dar's a foot uv it left. I promused ole marster I would."

Although he had lived by the river all his life, it was a constant mystery to him. It was such a capricious, erratic river. The valley through which it flowed was about eight miles wide, hemmed in on both sides by high bluffs, but in that valley what

pranks, what tricks, what manœuvres it played! Its course one year was never the same as it was the next, or as it had been the year before. Every spring, when the snows melted in the mountains and the "June rise" came, it moved over its bed of quicksand and cut its whimsical way here and there between the confining bluffs, with reckless disregard of property rights. With gigantic force and ghoulish glee, it swept away one man's land and added it to another's. It was like a great knife, slicing first on one side of a loaf and then on the other. Sometimes the slicing continued slowly, extending through months and years. Sometimes the knife worked rapidly, and instances were known where it had taken a whole farm in a night, and after a long time, gradually restored it. Through all the changes of years, the Dysart farm had remained intact; it had been enlarged by accretions and enriched by detritus from other lands. The channel of the river formed the boundary line between Missouri and Kansas, and citizenship was always uncertain along its banks. The shifting, insidious channel had a way of winding itself around a man's domain and transferring him and his possessions to another State while he slept quietly in his bed. "Muddy River" the Indians had named it, and the water never lost its dark stain, as human character never loses the stain of sin.

Ezra shook the lines over the back of the horse to rouse him, and they jogged on some distance farther. Soon, however, the old man's thoughts overcoming him, he stopped again.

"Ef Marse Tom only hed his sheer uv de lan'," he said. "How kin I keep dat trust uv ole missus? I leaves yo' to deal fair an' ekel betwixt my two boys, Ezra. I depose dat trust in yo', sez ole missus, but how kin I deal fair an' ekel betwixt 'em when Gord Almighty hisself holds de trumps an' is a-givin' 'em all to Marse Jim? How kin I do it?"

This question he found so hard to answer, that he left the horse standing in the furrow, and sat down under a tree by the fence to ponder it. It was a very hard question indeed, for "Marse Jim," returning along the road near dusk, saw the horse still standing in the unfinished furrow. At last, seeing the darkness coming on swiftly, Ezra rose, unhitched the horse and rode him home, coming in at the gate with a great show of hurry.

"Did you finish the field, Ezra?" asked Jim.

"Well, not 'zactly, Marse Jim. I couldn't do it to-day wid dat lazy, triflin' hoss, but I'll do it to-morrer sho'," he answered.

After supper, with his banjo under his arm, he took his way to "Marse Tom's" cabin that stood farther up the river, in a field adjoining the farm. Ezra thought that, as his days were spent with Jim, to be perfectly "fair an' ekel" between the two, he should pass his evenings with Tom.

The two young men were brothers. Before the coming of the Civil War six years before, they were inseparable comrades. Both were clever and accomplished. Tom, the younger, was the most popular young man in the community. His great strength made him a winner in athletic sports. He was the best rider, the best fencer and dancer for miles around. He and Jim were the only children of Colonel and Mrs. Dysart, who owned the finest plantation in that part of the country.

The dominant trait of Colonel Dysart's character was pride — pride of name, of ancestry, of opinion. When he espoused the cause of the Confederacy in the war between the States, his anger was great on learning that his younger son dared to rebel against his judgment and authority, and had sided with the Union. The offense was unpardonable. The young man was obstinate. Jim adopted his father's views, and bitter quarrels followed. The Colonel ordered his disobedient son from the house, and Tom, vowing never again to set his foot over the threshold, rode away, carrying with him into the conflict the memory of harsh words from his father and brother, cold looks from friends, and prayers and tears from his mother. For nearly a year after the war closed he stayed away, and then, haunted by the remembrance of his mother's tears, he set his face in a homeward direction. He meant to keep his oath, but he would see his mother once more. As soon as he arrived in the neighborhood, he was told that his father and mother were both dead, that the servants were scattered, and that Jim, after serving with credit on the other side, was now the sole heir to the family homestead. A fierce, bitter resentment against Jim filled his heart, and when they met, they passed each other haughtily, with eyes averted.

Tom was too poor to travel farther. He had nothing but his

gun, his horse, and the faded blue uniform that he wore. He rented a small field by his old home, and lived a solitary, lonely life. Not a word of complaint, however, passed his lips. He was "too much of a Dysart," as Ezra said, for that. He felt that he had been wronged, but that retribution would inevitably come to his brother for it, and he remained quietly passive, biding the time. Fate was certain to strike the blow swiftly and unerringly. On Sundays he sat aloof in a corner of the little church and watched Jim as he cheerfully joined in the hymns the minister "lined."

"Just wait till he loses everything—wait till misfortune comes to him, and then see if he can sing hymns like that—for it will come, it will come," said Tom, savagely. Old friends greeted him with frigid nods, but not a day passed without the coming of Ezra, often bringing an ash cake that he had made with his own hands, a rabbit, or a partridge for his young master's supper. During the warm spring evenings, he sat upon the doorstep at Tom's feet and played softly upon his banjo, or sang, in a quavering voice, the sweet old plantation songs of his childhood.

When he reached the cabin on that April evening, he sat in silence for a long time.

"Marse Tom, won't yo' please give me an inscription uv dat battle uv Misshunairy Ridge agin?" he finally asked. "I gits de most bee-ootiful idys fer my sermons from yo' inscriptions."

Like many of his race, Ezra, although illiterate, had a fondness for high-sounding words, the meaning of which he did not always comprehend. It was chiefly owing to the variety of wonderful words composing his vocabulary and the confidence with which he undertook their utterance, that he was often called upon to address a congregation of ex-slaves in the neighborhood.

Tom gave him an elaborate description of the battle of Missionary Ridge, of how Sheridan charged up the height, of how Grant anxiously watched the fighting from his position on Orchard Knob, and the final victory of the Northern troops.

"Thank yo', thank yo', Marse Tom, it wuz a most glorificashus battle."

"But how can my account of war help you with your sermons, Ezra?" asked Tom.

"Well, sah, dar am a new kind uv religion broke out among my hearahs. Dey calls demselves fatalists. Dey b'lieve what gwine happen is a-gwine happen, an' it ain't no use fer 'em to do dis an' dat, an' ef it wuzn't 'tended fer things to be so an' so, why it wuzn't. It's a mighty handy religion fer niggers to hev dese days. Dey argify dat ef de Lawd 'tends fer de wood to be chopped, it am a-gwine to git chopped, an' ef he keers fer de 'taters to be dug, he'll find a way to dig 'em. Well, I jest waits till I gits 'em befo' me an' I opens my artillery on 'em. I tells 'em ez how de battle am a-ragin' betwixt de debble's fo'ces an' de Lawd's. I inscribes to 'em how de Lawd's sojers cum a-ma'chin' up de hill till de debble cain't stop 'em, an' ef dey ain't prepa'ed to fight, dey gets killed wid dar boots on. Den one ole man he hollers out dat he am a-gwine join de army uv de Lawd; nudder falls on de flo' an' sez he am struck wid a bullet, an' nudder falls down an' sez it wuz a cannon ball dat hit him, sho'. I gits de wimmen a-cryin' an' de men a-shoutin' an' urgin' on de sojers, an' I is de gineral on a pow'ful wah-hoss off dar, d'rectin' 'em how to win de vict'ry. I pours some big bombshells uv high-falutinatin' words in dar ears till I fetches 'em most all down, an' dar I keeps em' a-moanin' an' a-groanin'. Atter while, I lifts 'em up an' I takes 'em in an amberlance to de hosspital, an' I 'nounces to 'em dat dey hez won de battle. Dar am mo' shoutin', but I tells 'em de wah ain't ober yit, dat dey must keep a-wukin' an' a-fightin' till de debble am whipped clean off uv de face uv de yearth. Den I sez to 'em ef Gord meant fer all de niggers to be free, what's de use hevin' a wah at all. I preaches ez how Gord ain't a-givin' to wastin' his ammernition dat away; dat all de fightin' an' wukin' is fer some pu'pose, an' I wants 'em to let dem fatalisms take keer uv demselves an' git to diggin' dem 'taters an' choppin' dat wood."

"I reckon ef dat ribber cuts high-jinks eroun' heah, it am some consolerdation to b'lieve it am a-gwine to be fer some good," he said to himself, as he trudged homeward.

Ezra was the only one of Colonel Dysart's thirty slaves that Jim found on the plantation on his return from the war. The place had been left in his keeping. His old mistress, worn with grief, died soon after she saw her boys depart, entrusting them to his care, and he had accepted the trust. Then his old master

died, entrusting his son Jim to his care and exhorting him to stay on the place, and he had accepted the trust and promised.

"I goes wid de lan'," he said, when Jim informed him that he, too, was entitled to his freedom. He resumed his duties about the premises, and only upon one occasion did he ever intimate that household affairs might be more to his liking than they had been in the most flourishing days of the old regimé. Jim held a short religious service each night, as had been his father's custom, and Ezra was always present. There was a chapter read from the Bible, followed by prayer. The chapters read by Jim furnished Ezra with many texts and "high-falutinatin'" words for his sermons.

At the conclusion of the service one evening, he remained in the room, awkward and embarrassed.

"Well, what is it, Ezra?" asked Jim.

"'Scuse me, Marse Jim, I don't mean no 'fence, sah"—he began.

"That's all right; speak it out."

"Well, den, I heahs yo' readin' purty much 'bout John de Babtist, but I'se a Meferdist, sah—I'se a Meferdist, an' ef it's jest de same to yo', I'd like to heah a little 'bout John de Meferdist."

From that time forward, he was called "Methodist John" until he had almost lost his old name of Ezra.

Unceasingly he labored to reconcile the estranged brothers. He felt keenly the disgrace of family trouble. "I'se a Dysart nigger an' I hez de fambly pride," he told himself. Jim, passing his cabin one night, heard him praying:

"O Gord, bring 'em to-gedder agin. I'se toted 'em bofe on my back; I'se dandled 'em bofe on my knee. When I gits to Heaben, ole marster'll say, How 'bout my boy, but ole missus'll say, How 'bout my *boys?* O Gord, make it so when I gits dar, I won't hev to hide out in de woods fer fear uv meetin' ole miss an' she ax me de question, What hez yo' done wid dat trust I deposed in yo'?"

Jim's heart was of stone, but Ezra did not despair of softening it. When one plan failed, he tried another.

"I heerd 'bout how Marse Tom got dem scars on his face," he

remarked to Jim one evening. The silence that followed was interpreted by him as an encouragement to proceed.

"It wuz while he wuz runnin' away endurin' uv de battle dat one uv de sojers up an' hit him wid ——"

"Shut up, you old fool!" angrily interrupted Jim, "how dare you listen to tales about a Dysart being a coward?" But the old man only rubbed his hands and chuckled to himself. "I jest knowed Marse Jim nebber could stan' dat. He'll come eroun' all right yit."

If he found Jim's heart to be of stone, Tom's was of steel. He would have accepted no favors from his brother had any been offered. All the long days of the springtime he toiled in the field, and in the evenings sat in his door-way, gazing idly at the river and waiting for the trouble that was to come to Jim.

. . . . . .

The season was advancing. Nature was quickening her steps. The balm of opening rose-buds filled the air. The snows were melting in the mountains, and the lately lazy river now rushed headlong over its bed of quicksand. Now and then it would shoot out a long arm and vainly clutch at some coveted point of land. Treacherous eddies opened and closed again; huge sand-bars rose to the surface, remained a short time and disappeared, and the June rise was yet to come.

Ezra's eyes were upon the river, too. To his warnings Jim paid no heed. He laughed at the old man's fears, and said:

"The farm has been here longer than we have, and will be here, doubtless, when we are gone."

"So it will, Marse Jim, but de ribber'll be a-runnin' ober it."

It was past midnight one night near the middle of June, when Tom awoke and found Ezra bending over him. The full moon was shining through the open door, and Tom could see even the wrinkles on the black face.

"It's come, Marse Tom," said Ezra, simply.

Tom raised himself on his elbow, and as he listened, a dull, heavy roaring broke on his ears. There was no mistaking that sound. The knife was at its work. The hour he had waited for had come; the blow he had wished for and expected so long, had fallen. He sprang to his feet.

"Did you notify him?" he asked.

"Not yit, Marse Tom, but I'se gwine now," said Ezra, and started at a run along the crumbling bank. Great masses of earth slipped into the water; the waves closed over them, and the current swept them onward.

"Come back!" called Tom, imperiously, but the negro, answering something about treating somebody fair and equal, pressed on. Tom, standing and mechanically watching him, saw the ground suddenly give way and Ezra carried into the boiling, seething vortex. For a moment Tom stood, unable to move. If a negro had risked his life for those he had served, should he, Tom Dysart, let one of his own flesh and blood remain unconscious of danger? For an instant longer he hesitated; then, making a détour through the meadow, keeping away from the caving bank, he ran toward his old home. More than half the farm had already gone. Could he reach the house before it went too? He could still hear the roaring of the river and its cutting on the shore. He passed the row of empty negro cabins. He turned the corner of the house, and sprang upon the veranda. The soft night-wind brought the scent of roses to his nostrils. As he opened the door and passed again over its threshold, the bright moonlight flooded the hall, and illumined the face of the tall clock that had ticked in its corner for years. It shone upon his father's rifle on the wall. The door of the sitting room was open, and, as he passed it, he saw his mother's chair drawn close to the hearth in the same place where she had sat the night he rode away. He climbed the stairs and made his way to the bedroom that he and Jim had always occupied together. A moment later he stood beside his brother. Jim opened eyes of doubt, wonder and amazement.

"Jim, come quick; the house is going into the river."

"This house? Not while I live in it, sir."

Tom felt a tremor pass through the mansion. He did not wait to argue the question. He gathered his resisting, struggling brother in his arms, carried him down the stairs, and put him down at a safe place.

"How dare you——" began Jim, just as the mansion, with creaking timbers, with shrieks and groans as if at its own fate, sank down into the devouring flood.

Jim fell upon the ground and clasped his brother around his knees.

"O Tom, you have saved me, but I don't deserve it. The place was yours as well as mine. I always meant to tell you — but I didn't. Father threatened to take it away from you, but he never did. He couldn't do it. It was yours, and now it's gone."

But the writhing river, like a great, rapacious monster, gorged with what it had already taken, or seeking a new whim, finding another object on which it wished to try its strength, passed on, withdrew as quickly as it came, and left the rest of the land to them.

It was a day or two before the river was safe to venture upon. At the end of that time, Jim and Tom, passing down it in a skiff, heard sounds from a low island near them. They rowed nearer and descried Ezra, much the worse for wear, lying with his face to the ground. They thought his mind must be wandering, from the effect of the hardships he had passed through.

"I'se toted 'em bofe on my back; I'se dandled 'em bofe on my knee, fair an' ekel," he was saying. "I'se ready to meet ole marster, but I ain't quite ready to meet ole miss yit."

When he saw them, he started and cried out, "Thank Gord! Now I kin meet ole marster an' ole miss bofe."

Tom lifted him into the boat, and Jim asked, "Why, Ezra, how came you here?"

"Well, sah, when dat lan' begin to go, I jest follered it an' swum with it till at last a big piece landed heah, an' I grabbed it an' jumped onter it." Though faint from hunger and weakness, he exclaimed triumphantly, "I promused ole marster I'd stick to de lan', an' I done it."

Dalton's Inspiration.*

BY STELLA B. McDONALD.

AURICE DALTON was discouraged. It seemed to him he had spent all his life painting pictures of rural scenes, in which there were forever the same clump of trees spreading their branches over artistic little streams, the same always-blue sky, and the same familiar cows disporting themselves in the background. "Sweet things," the women called them, while the men shrugged their shoulders and bought them for their wives. And Dalton had always remained indifferent to the shrugs so long as his pictures had a certain demand and brought him fair prices.

But yesterday the demon of discontent had entered his brain. "Hang the luck," thought Dalton to himself, "I ought to have been a girl and painted on velvet with a pen. I'm not sure that I didn't work worsted butterflies when I was a kid." By which it will be seen that Giles Dalton, artist, possessed no exalted opinion of himself or of women's accomplishments.

The change had occurred the night before, at a musicale, when his friend Mott had introduced him to a stunning girl, and she, with a charmingly rude smile, had said, "I hope you are no relative of Dalton, the artist."

Dalton unblushingly disclaimed any kinship with himself, and Miss Forsythe had gone on to say, "That man has honestly made me despise the country as he sees it. Ugh! I loathe his green fields, and his cows haunt my very dreams. It is incomprehensible to me how a man can plod on and on with such characterless, inane daubs as his."

Dalton smiled feebly and said, "Don't you think maybe you are a bit rough on the fellow? Maybe he would have soared higher but found his talent unequal to his aspirations."

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"No," replied Miss Forsythe, "I was talking to Carl Brooks, an intimate friend of his, and he said this Dalton was perfectly contented and would die painting daisy-studded meadows. Bah! I can just picture such a man — slender, blond, effeminate, with white hands and a Van Dyke, and of all detestable things, I think a beard is the climax."

Dalton reared his dark head on his broad shoulders and passed his hand over his smooth, square-jawed face with a sense of peculiar satisfaction. Then he asked, "Do you paint, Miss Forsythe?"

Her eyes danced as she replied, "Only once in a great while, Mr. Dalton, when I am unusually pale. But seriously, there is nothing on earth appeals to me like a splendid canvas. I can sing and play, but am not fond of music; I write and read, but books bore me. I do not sketch, model or paint, but it is the regret of my life. Nothing moves me like art, and I have inspiration enough for any number of masterpieces, but I cannot execute a thing."

"Why don't you become acquainted with Dalton, the artist, and give him some of your ideas? He may not have the making of a genius in him, but, anyway, his evolution under your personal supervision would be most interesting."

"Here comes Auntie," interrupted Miss Forsythe, as a stately woman advanced toward them; "were you looking for me? Well," she said over her shoulder to Dalton as she turned away, "I have an idea that would place any artist who learns it among the ranks of the old masters and that would build up a new school in art. Come, Auntie."

Dalton noticed her profile as she stood a moment in the crowd. It was not remarkable for beauty or for youth, but there was a sense of dignified purpose in every feature — a certain knowledge of something self-contained that appealed more than mere good looks. She wore a pale yellow gown of some loosely flowing material that reflected its warmth into her ivory skin and pale gold hair. But it was her eyes with which Dalton was most impressed, eyes of a peculiar hazel, with golden glints in them that reached into one's memory and lodged there. Dalton thought of Le Gallienne's "Golden Girl": he still felt strangely excited

over the conversation when he made his adieus and went for his coat and hat.

As he went down the steps under the awning, he was conscious of a tall, graceful figure in a gorgeous cloth-of-gold cloak beside him for an instant as Miss Forsythe and her aunt moved toward their carriage. Leaning toward her he whispered. "Of course you knew I am Dalton, the artist."

"Yes," she replied, with a direct, golden gaze into his eyes, "and I knew that you knew I knew."

And thus had come Dalton's awakening to something more ambitious, and the dawn of the next day found him sitting in his evening clothes, with the fire long gone out, but with an unwonted fever in his veins that made him insensible to cold or fatigue.

The next morning, blue and discouraged, Dalton went to his studio with lagging steps, which finally halted before an easel bearing the canvas he had left unfinished the day before — "Sunset on the Farm."

Yesterday it had seemed good to him, but now it jarred upon his newly developed taste so roughly that he struck out at it with his fist and demolished a bunch of sheep that were gamboling with incompleted anatomy on a hillside. Around the studio were others of the same style — inane, without character — the kind that are never remembered after the first exclamation of "How pretty!"

Dalton placed one on the fire-dogs in the huge fireplace and watched its painted corners curl up with a feeling of peculiar satisfaction. Picture followed picture until the studio was stripped, and when the last one was gone with a final burst of little sparks that reached out viciously for him, he turned his feet wearily from the studio and went down into the street like an old man tired of life.

At luncheon at the Club, he sat next to his old chum, Carl Brooks. After a little talk, Dalton was wondering how he could lead the conversation to the subject that filled his mind, when Brooks introduced it himself, by saying, "I saw you doing the society act at the Belmonts' last night."

"Yes," replied Dalton, with a carefully careless manner, "I

heard that you had been saying a good word for me behind my back."

Brooks grinned. "Oh, thunder, old man! I did give you a blast, but you know you are confoundedly apathetic in your art, and I hope Miss Forsythe brought it home to you."

"She did that all right. But I'll forgive you if you'll tell me something about her. Who is she?"

"She is the last of the Philip Forsythes, about thirty years old, spends most of her time abroad and can afford the luxury of unlimited letters of credit. She hasn't a rep. as a beauty, but her cleverness and those weird yellow eyes render her interesting, and a certain elusiveness and mystery about her make some people declare her fascinating. That rather grand lady who always accompanies her is her aunt, and I fancy the fair Forina leads her a dance."

"What an absurb name," interposed Dalton, "it's sort of a cross between a breakfast-food and Raphael's lady-love — neither of them very desirable articles. But tell me, she talked to me in a rather unusual way for a first meeting — is eccentricity her pose?"

"Not in the least," replied Brooks, "her father was a decidedly queer duck and tried to bear out the Martian theory and similar fairy-tales. In fact some went so far as to say he was not strictly *compos mentis*. The daughter is as genuine as they make 'em, but a bit too progressive for the average mind. Hence, she is dubbed eccentric."

Dalton frowned in a preoccupied manner, and then remarked, "Well, she's decidedly interesting, and she's played havoc in my studio."

"How do you mean?"

"Simply that I've destroyed every canvas in it."

"For Heaven's sake! Aren't you going to paint any more?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do. I know that I never want to go into the country again — I'd be ashamed to look a cow in the face." He slouched up out of his chair, reached for his hat, and added, "You don't happen to know where she's stopping, do you?"

"No," replied Brooks, "but I can find out and let you know,

for my mother and her aunt are warm friends. Shall I find you at the studio ?"

"Yes. Many thanks. Ta-ta, old man," and Dalton's broad back vanished through the door.

Dalton returned to his studio in a listless, disinterested way, and a pang of self-pity swept over him as he beheld the bare walls, and skeleton-like easels. First pulling a cord that let fall a soft yellow drapery over the sky-light, thus flooding the room with a mellowness that veiled somewhat its desolation, he lighted his meerschaum, and sat ruminating over his life until it seemed to him his future stretched out in a waste too dreary to be contemplated. He was a failure, and he had not even recognized the fact until the frank scorn of a woman had opened his eyes. Now, what was left to him ? If he were starving to death, he could never produce anything rural again, and he had absolutely no talent for painting any other subject. How long he had sat there he did not know — he was conscious only that the Sleepy Hollow chair was alluringly adaptable to the curves of one's body, and the mellow light most restful to one's tired brain.

Suddenly before his eyes appeared a thin, vapory mist, which rapidly grew in density until he seemed to be enveloped in a yellowish fog, except that instead of being chill and depressing, it gave out a subtle warmth that vaguely exhilarated him. He sat up in his chair, tossing his head to shake off any possible trick of the imagination, but in every direction his gaze met the peculiar yellow haze. He sank back again, trying to calm his bewitched mind, then sprang up quickly and stood trembling, facing one corner of the room. There the fog had dissolved so as to leave clear a picture, the composition of which burned into Dalton's brain as a branding-iron marks the flesh of a steer. A woman stood on his model-platform — Forina Forsythe, clad in a gold gown of some exquisite fabric that fell in shimmering folds around her lithe body. In her hands she held a crystal, into which she was gazing with such horror as could only be the expression of utmost fear, and as Dalton looked closer, he also saw, in the glass ball, the scene that caused such terror in her eyes. In miniature what appeared like a piece of stone was shown, across which was lying a woman's arm in the relaxation of death. The

rest of the woman's body was lost in the reflection of the glass, but Dalton could easily detect upon the arm the same antique scarab bracelet that he had noticed on Miss Forsythe's. One other detail added to the grewsomeness of the whole — a fat loathesome worm was undulating slowly but steadily toward the woman's upturned palm.

Dalton shuddered and recalled with repulsion that he was one of the most enthusiastic followers of the new fad of crystal-gazing. How horrible it all was, and how the woman was suffering ! If only he could catch an expression like that on canvas it would be a masterpiece ! Still, ought not he to destroy the illusion and end such agony even though it be imaginary ?

He started toward the platform, when, almost as though Forina spoke to him, a voice seemed to say, " Paint ! Paint ! Work !"

Dalton threw back his shoulders, laughed aloud and dashed through the fog to the opposite corner where he kept fresh canvases. Selecting the largest, snatching up charcoal, and dragging an easel, he made his way back to the point from which every detail of the picture was clear to him. Then throwing himself into a chair he began to sketch with an unwonted boldness.

The seconds rushed into minutes, and the minutes into hours, and Dalton replaced charcoal with paint and worked with feverish concentration. He was dimly conscious that some one rapped on the studio door and then departed, and somewhere in the mist-filled room a telephone rang several times. But Dalton was beyond being disturbed, and his brushes flew from palette to canvas as though guided by the shade of a Guido. Once he realized that night had descended, but though the room was full of dark, cloudy shadows, the light about the model-platform and easel was as softly strong as summer sunshine. Not once did Forina's slender figure falter from the trying position ; not once did her horror-stricken gaze wander from the crystal, and still Dalton painted on, though the heat of fever crept over his brow, his head throbbed, and he felt a faintness that almost conquered him.

Somewhere out of the night a clock struck three, but the silence was unbroken save for the strokes of the brush as it flew over the canvas. Then followed such sounds as mark the progress of day in the city — the rumbling of the milk-carts, the cries of the news-

boys, children's laughter and shouts on their way to school, a street-piano grinding out the complaint that "Everybody works but father." The bells and whistles proclaimed the respite of noon after the morning's labor, and then came the children returning at four, and the whistles again at six announcing that day's work over.

Dalton was painting in the last reflection in the crystal when he felt a peculiar numbness steal over him, the hand holding the brush fell powerless to his side, and the woman on the model-platform seemed melting away. He tried to pull himself together and to put out a detaining hand, but it was no use ; he felt much the same sensation he had once experienced while taking chloroform — the struggle to remain cognizant of surroundings and the gradual slipping away into unreal space.

Several hours later they broke in the door and found him lying there, unconscious, before a canvas which startled them into awe and admiration as they gazed. Could this be the work of Dalton, the gay, self-satisfied dilettante? And if he had produced this work of art, who had been his model ? What miracle had taken place ?

The next day the doctor's fussy little back had scarcely disappeared, when Dalton pulled himself weakly out of bed and into bath-robe and slippers, and climbed the stairs to his studio. At the door he paused, hesitating to destroy what he knew must have been a chimera of his tired brain when he had sat down with his meerschaum in the Sleepy Hollow chair. Then he went inside, closed the door after him and walked straight to the spot where he recalled that his canvas had been placed. Again he paused and brushed his hand in bewilderment over his eyes, scarcely able to grasp the miracle of the painting before him — such beauty of coloring, such dignity, such intelligent understanding of his subject he saw in the work. Even as he wondered he gave a shout of exultation as he realized that ambition and inspiration had claimed him, and that he was young and full of strength and energy to carry out his new ideals. He had felt that there was more than an ordinary interest attached to his meeting with Miss Forsythe ; he must see her and tell her what this marvellous dream of her had accomplished for him.

He went hurriedly to the telephone and called up Brooks, who had promised to obtain her address for him.

Mr. Brooks was not there, so the maid answered. He and his mother had gone to Mrs. Forsythe's to see if they could be of any assistance.

"Assistance?" asked Dalton.

"Yes, Mr. Dalton; did you not see it in the papers?"

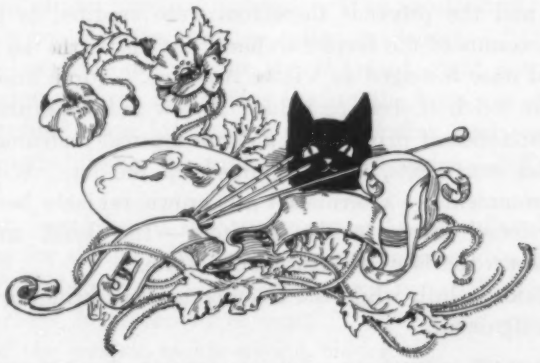
"Papers?" he repeated stupidly.

"Yes, sir; they are full of it."

"Full of *what*?"

"Miss Forsythe, sir. She was gone all day yesterday and the night before, and last night the police found her right near your studio, and she was dead, sir. The doctors say she must have fainted and struck her head on the stone curbing as she fell, for there is a terrible gash in her left temple. Anyway, she's dead, Mr. Dalton, and they say Mrs. Forsythe is almost crazy. Yes, sir, what did you say, sir? Mr. Dalton?—Well, he's polite to ring off like that."

Dalton dropped the receiver and stumbled over to a chair into which he literally fell, trying to grasp what he had heard. His gaze fixed on the glorious canvas from which the golden girl stood out mysteriously, and then wandered to the bare model-platform, and the empty years stretched out wearily before him as he pondered the never-solved problem—the miracle of his inspiration.



The Siddons Dagger.*

BY E. O. WEEKS.

IN the month of March, 1899, was held one of the Public Administrator's sales of the effects of persons dying intestate and without known kith and kin. Among the relics of other departed worthies were those of one Victor Anselmo, indifferently regarded in his day as a collector of prints and mementoes pertaining to the theatrical profession. Of course, nobody supposed that the late Mr. Anselmo would leave anything of value; but, as it is impossible to tell what may turn up on such occasions, a number of gentlemen interested in curiosities were present—notably, Mr. Abbot Warford, a staid dealer in curios and antiques.

The acting auctioneer was a young man astonishingly gifted with fluent speech and flowing humor. When he stood up, to begin his few hours of rapid work, he gazed with smiling eyes at the singular collection of buyers and things to be sold—at wealthy men, like Mr. Warford, and curb-stone dealers in trash, at costly wardrobes and bundles of old clothes.

One after another, parcels of odds and ends passed under the hammer, and the proceeds therefrom were credited to the posthumous accounts of the former owners. At last came the property which had once belonged to Victor Anselmo. To be brief, it did not contain much of seeming value. A few faded costumes, three or four portfolios of prints, half a dozen musical instruments, and some tinsel ornaments, about summed up the lot. With many amusing comments—a tarnished gilt crown rakishly bent to one side occasioned mirth to the auditors—the brisk auctioneer knocked down the late Mr. Anselmo's estate.

Then came a lull, while the attendants were bringing forward a fresh assignment.

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Glancing restlessly about, the auctioneer discovered that he had overlooked one object of art in the Anselmo collection — a dagger. It had been placed on his desk unnoticed.

Grasping it quickly, he pressed it to his heart, rolling his eyes upward with a melancholy stare. In a moment, he looked down again with assumed gravity.

"Observe," said he, "what I hold in my hand."

The buyers were observant and humorous, but not enthusiastic. The dagger was certainly a very sorry specimen of the favorite weapon of the Tragic Muse. Evidently, on divers occasions, it had been coated with cheap gold paint, now turned black and blistery with age and oxidation. From point to pommel all distinctive markings were obscured. Only a certain well-defined outline saved it from an appearance utterly disreputable.

"What do I hold in my hand?" continued the auctioneer. "A cast-iron dagger, undoubtedly, and, perchance, once the property of Sarah Siddons, Kemble's sister, the dramatic queen of the last century. Ten to one, her niece, Fanny Kemble, brought it over when she came to this country in 1832.—Then what am I offered for the dagger of Mrs. Siddons, the greatest of all the queens of the stage? — Gentlemen, do not speak as one man, for I desire to give everybody a chance!"

The auctioneer paused. Not a bid followed.

"Do not be afraid, gentlemen," he said. "Let someone start moderately — say at about one hundred dollars! I will entertain a bid of one hundred dollars! — Who speaks first?"

An idle youth in the audience called out boldly — "One Cent." Now the wealthy and solemn Mr. Warford could not have told what possessed him; but at this instant the keen eye of the auctioneer turned upon him with a waggish wink, and ere he knew what he was doing, he said in a loud voice — "Twenty-five Cents!"

"Hear, hear!" said the auctioneer — "I am offered seventy-five cents for the favorite dagger of the incomparable Sarah Siddons. Her dagger is going — going — going. — It has gone to Mr. Warford for seventy-five cents!" He bowed grandly, and presented the weapon to his second bidder.

While he paid the humorously trebled bid without a murmur,

Mr. Warford hurriedly thrust the miserable dagger into his overcoat pocket. He then left the place with a confused idea that he had made a fool of himself.

Soon after his departure, a young man entered in hot haste. For a few minutes he listened to the proceedings with feverish attention, and then he turned to a bystander and asked how long the sales had been going on. "Oh, for an hour or more," the man answered.

"Do you happen to remember," inquired the newcomer, while his lips twitched nervously, "whether a lot once belonging to Victor Anselmo has been offered?"

"Let me think," answered the other; "I don't recall the name: — what was the stuff like?"

"Well," replied the questioner, impatiently, "all sorts of odds and ends — old costumes, prints, musical instruments, etc."

"And a dagger?" asked the man, remembering more especially the amusing part of the sale.

"Yes, yes; a dagger, beyond a doubt," replied the other, with a very uneasy look in his eyes.

"Well, I remember some fun about an old gilt crown, and soon after there was joking about a dagger; finally, it was sold to Mr. Warford, the dealer in curiosities."

The questioner turned aside with a pale face. Still unsatisfied, he approached a gentleman having the bearing of a virtuoso. Of him he inquired concerning the sale of old Victor's effects.

"Knocked down more than half an hour ago," answered the gentleman; "nothing in it."

"How about the dagger Mr. Warford bought?" asked the young man.

"Oh, that was a joke," said the gentleman, "a poor joke. I was greatly surprised that Warford should so conduct himself. He must have been taking too much wine."

Again the questioner turned aside. His face, now, was crimson with vexation. "To think," he said to himself, "that I should have been too late!" He hurried out to the street, where a cab was awaiting him. Inside, sat a very handsome young woman. "Were you in time? — were you too late? — did you get it?" she inquired, all in one breath. By way of answer, he gave the

driver Warford's number, bounced in, and banged the door shut.

During the intervening time, the dealer in rare works of art had returned to his premises. He walked back to the room where the porter did the packing. Here stood a large crate filled with old silverware. It was to be sent upstairs to the furbisher — a skilful man, who could give just the right touch to old things, making them look attractive, but not new. Our worthy gentleman gazed about him furtively. His chagrin over his miserable joke had not subsided. He desired to get rid of the inanimate cause of his outburst. So, after hurriedly slipping the disreputable weapon into the cleaner's basket, he went back to his private office.

Now, as the young actor and actress in the cab discussed the difficulties in the way of their gaining possession of the dagger, they decided to countermand the driver's order to go to Warford's while they took further counsel. We shall find them, accordingly, seated at a retired table in a restaurant which they frequented.

The actress is a blonde, dashingly handsome, and rather tall for a woman; the actor, not so tall, is dark, sad-eyed and tragic. He has a wonderful gift of changing the tones of his voice and the expression of his face; and, what is still more remarkable, he seems to have also, for the time being, considerable ready money!

"Well, what do you advise?" he asks his companion, as he shoves his chair back from the table.

"I'll tell you what I think," she replied. "You do not know what Warford paid for the dagger. You ought to have found that out. He joked about his purchase. How much did he pay for his joke? If he paid well for it, he may have been feigning indifference. If it cost him but a few dimes, he probably did not know or care what he was buying. Then go to Warford, at once, and find out what he thinks of his bargain. Your room and wardrobe are not far away. I advise you to make-up in a suitable character, and then to go to him with a mournful story about the memento of a departed friend. I will wait for you here."

The young actor arose in haste and started away on this errand.

And soon thereafter a sad-appearing old gentleman entered Warford's place and inquired for the proprietor. He was promptly shown to the private office. Warford stood up to meet him with

business in his eye; for the dear old man showed every sign of being a well-to-do and inveterate antiquary. He began with a plaintive story of his having been engaged for years in making a collection of daggers of all kinds and shapes. He had even gained possession of a few once belonging to celebrities. He had traced the record of one dagger, which, while it had no value, was attractive because of associations. This dagger had been the property of old Victor Anselmo, with whom he had bargained for it, and it was understood between them that he was to have it for twenty dollars. Then Mr. Anselmo had died suddenly, and he was compelled to await the public sale of his effects. Owing to the infirmities of age, he had been slow in getting to the auction, and when he arrived, he was told that the dagger had been knocked down to Mr. Warford for a mere song and that the sale was regarded as a ridiculous joke.

Up to that closing remark the conspirators had stood very near to success. The feeble old gentleman's story had touched Warford's antiquarian sympathies. It had been his intention to send for the dagger and pocket the proffered double-eagle. But now, when his first and only joke came home to him so hard, his annoyance urged him to stand up for his unsightly bargain. He determined to give his dignity a prop by claiming that he knew a good thing when it came to his notice. He said, therefore, in his most emphatic manner: "My dear sir, I should be glad to oblige you, but the auctioneer spoke of that dagger as having once been the property of the famous Mrs. Siddons, and I paid three times as much for it as I had intended to pay when I at first began to bid! I can't part with it. I have sent it up-stairs to be furbished."

Nothing could have been more crushing to the aged antiquary's hopes than this threefold reply. The value of the dagger was surmised, a big price had been given for it, the wonderful secret concealed by the coat of black and blistery paint would be revealed! Disappointment deprived him of the power of ready speech. He walked out of the office mumbling incoherently and with the gait of a man ninety years old.

Warford watched the retreating figure with compunction, and also with sincere regret for the vanishing twenty dollars, and then he endeavored to dismiss the troublesome subject from his mind.

Into the restaurant, not far away, presently ambled the dejected old man, who moodily related to the fair actress the tale of his fruitless errand.

She listened composedly to the sorrowful recital, and then tendered further excellent advice.

"In the pursuit of a worthy object," she said, "you must not be so easily dismayed. When the poet said, 'things are not what they seem,' he expressed a good idea for us and other people to remember. You have gained much by the interview. You have discovered a great discrepancy between what was said at the auction and by Warford. Somebody is lying; certainly not the bystanders, for they have no good reason for so doing; therefore it must be our very respectable dealer in antiques! Probably what he wants is more money than you offered. Keep at him, then, up to the limit of your purse. It may be some time before he finds out the actual value of his prize. We are both skilful in disguise. We must study our man — his habits, his peculiarities — and worry out of him what we want. Perhaps, when he discovers the double secret of the dagger, he may be sick of his strange treasure. Let us pester him, then, until he surrenders it to us from sheer distress of mind!"

For several days the innocent, or, if you choose, the malign dagger, remained unobserved at the bottom of the furbisher's crate. But when, at last, that careful man emptied the packing-waste out upon the floor, the dagger was discovered. The furbisher held the sorry weapon up to the light with an air of severe scrutiny.

Apparently, somebody had tried to play upon him with a cast-iron joke!

Nevertheless, on several notable occasions, Mr. Warford had discovered merit in disguise, and so the man reserved judgment.

He scraped the blade a little, to determine the nature of the composition covering it, and then completely immersed it in a glass trough containing an active solvent. He then retired the trough to a shelf in a dark corner to give the fluid time to work.

The vagrant weapon had been ignominiously soaking for a week, perhaps, when Mr. Warford himself came up to inquire about the articles in the basket.

The furbisher was pleased to think that his work was done—all excepting the old dagger; he had forgotten that. He exhibited to his employer the various pieces of ancient silver. They were in perfect order for the salesroom. Mr. Warford examined them without comment and directed that they should be sent down. Then, looking about, he said abruptly:

"Where's that old dagger!"

The cleaner hurried to the dark corner, fished the weapon out of the trough, ran it quickly through a bath of soap and water, and approached his employer, drying it with a cloth, and almost without having had a chance to scan its appearance. The limpid solvent had done its work well. As the dagger was exposed to view in the broad light of day an exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of master and man.

The weapon was a magnificent specimen of artisanship in steel, jewels, and gold!

The dealer in curios and antiques studied it with growing amazement. Surely a thing like this had never been seen in New York!

The blade was flame-shaped, and had tapering, wave-like flutes running from heel to point; around haft and guard were coiled two gold serpents, exquisitely wrought and studded with gems, and with heads turned down to meet the flutes; the pommel had the form of a massive gold crown, and the serrations were bent inward to make a bezel for holding in place an enormous ruby!

Yes, the ruby on the pommel of old Victor Anselmo's dagger was worth thousands of dollars!

Why it was so, Warford could not have told, but from the very day when he bought the dagger he had been led on into a series of lying deceptions. Even now, in the moment of his singular triumph, he could not refrain from attempting to impress his humble employee with his astuteness.

"Everybody laughed, Joseph," said he, "when I persisted in bidding for that weapon, and, finally, I was obliged to pay for it three times as much as I had intended; but the result more than justifies my zeal! This is the most remarkable instance of discernment I have ever shown!"

With the luster of reflected glory upon him, Joseph bent to his

superior; and then, as the superb trophy was not quite dry, he proposed to give it a rub with boxwood sawdust and finish it off with a silken brush; and to this Mr. Warford assented, and sat down to await the completed work.

Under Joseph's adroit manipulation it was soon done, and he handed the resplendent weapon to its lucky (or unlucky) owner.

As the dagger passed between them it seemed to be a thing of flame; the great ruby threw a ruddy glow on the ceiling of the room;—the shining blade, the coiling serpents with emerald eyes, the alternating gems around the crown of gold, all gave forth the scintillations of light.

The better to carry his prize down to the office unobserved, Mr. Warford wrapped it about with his handkerchief. His face was flushed with pleasure over his stupendous bargain. He felt that this most conspicuous victory over the other shrewd collectors was like a great general's triumph. But even as he turned to descend the stairs, the watchful furbisher called out in haste: "One moment, if you please; that dagger is as sharp as a needle. I fear you have scratched your finger!"

Warford looked at his handkerchief. It was discolored with spots like blood! With a pale face he laid the dagger down while he examined his hands. He could not see the sign of a puncture. Neither master nor man could discover evidence of the slightest hurt! Mr. Warford unwrapped the dagger to examine that. As he did so, three large, red drops dripped to the floor!

The two men looked at each other with questioning eyes. This was the strangest thing that as yet had come up out of Egypt!

It is not to be supposed that the conspirators had been inactive. Far from it. The old man whom Warford had mistaken for a well-to-do and persistent antiquary had been persistent indeed. With one plea and another he had come again and again; and with each visit his offer for the late Mr. Anselmo's dagger had grown apace, until now it stood at two hundred dollars. In fact, so nearly had the plotters attained their object for the second time, that when Warford went up to see Joseph, he had parted with the antiquary in the office under promise to accept his money. And left to himself, that weak old creature had chuckled with consuming joy!

But now, when Warford came back with the dagger carefully wrapped from sight, and hastily placed it in his fireproof safe, and resolutely locked the door, the venerable humorist felt at once the chill of zero.

The dealer turned upon him with a pale and disturbed face.

"Sir," he said, "you have been coming here persistently and greatly to my annoyance ; and I must tell you once and for all that I will not part with that dagger. In the first place, it is worth more than I had supposed ; and in the second place, you knew its value, and you have deliberately tried to get the better of me. In the circumstances, I decline to have anything more to do with you !"

Even in the brunt of this terrible rebuff the dogged old man endeavored to regain his footing.

"Why, Warford," he quavered, "you should be ashamed of yourself to talk to a man of my years in that way. I was an antiquary when you were a baby. I did know the value of the dagger — that I'll admit ; but you can't deny that I've offered you the value in two hundred dollars. I will now offer you more than it is worth. I'll give you two hundred and fifty — yes, two hundred and seventy-five dollars. Remember, in an ethical sense, it should have been mine in the first place, and you will do wrong to refuse my proposition!"

Mr. Warford's expression showed regret. He wished that he could say something to soften his harsh words.

The antiquary was quick to observe the change.

"Warford," said he, "let me ask you to consider furthermore that I am eighty-four years old ! This may be almost my last wish. Do not refuse the request of a man aged enough to be your grandfather."

Out of sheer desperation, and in the hope of getting rid of his importunate tormentor by exhibiting to him the utter absurdity of his offer, Warford rushed to his safe, and hastily unwrapping the weapon flashed it before the eyes of his visitor.

The dazzling display exceeded even the antiquary's dreams. The unobtainable glory of the blade came home to him so hard that he actually felt as if its needle-like point had been thrust into his heart. He stared at Warford like a person in a trance.

In his excitement the dealer in antiques waved the dagger back and forth with great energy, and while so doing, the three large, red drops fell to the floor again !

The antiquary looked at this grewsome sight with the horrified expression of a tragic mask. He threw his hands upward in consternation, and declaring that he would not now have the weapon at any price, betook himself out of the shop.

Greatly disconcerted, Warford returned his treasure to the safe with a trembling hand, and when his thoughts reverted to it, the bloody drops outvied the giant ruby !

But when the disheartened antiquary presented his report to the young actress, she declared that her time to play a part had come. She said she believed Warford was in a state of panic and vigorous measures would make him surrender the prize.

Warford was visited now by a blond young gentleman, who made no secret of the fact that he was spending money lavishly on a queen of the stage. She was to appear (so he said) as Lady Macbeth, and if dollars would smooth her pathway to fame it was his intention to lay them down. This frank and attractive young person came very frequently to see Mr. Warford, and on every occasion he selected a rare trifle, for which he paid a good price. At last he reached the point of inquiring about a suitable dagger for his dear one. It must be superior (so he said) to all the daggers known to the Macbeth exhibition. It must be a very remarkable dagger indeed !

With a sigh, the dealer thought of "the dagger of the bleeding ruby," for it was so that he now called it by name. He had learned to dread the sight of the amazing weapon. Perhaps this extravagant young fellow might lift the burden of its possession from his heart and hand.

"Ah," he said to his customer, "at last I know what you want. I have it. I will sell it to you at a fraction of its value ; but even then you may be dismayed. What I shall offer to you is the dagger of the great ruby — once the property of the Nabob of Pondicherry ! — But you shall have it for five thousand dollars !"

The blond young gentleman opened his blue eyes very wide, and yet he did not blanch at price or fabrication.

"Show it to me," he said; "if it is what I want, I'll buy it." Warford hurried to his safe; returning quickly, he laid the glittering weapon on a polished table before his youthful customer. Never before had the dangerous relic looked so brilliant: The golden serpents set with gems, the flame-shaped blade, the vast ruby — all gave forth the fulness of garnered light.

"I will take it!" said the young gentleman, excitedly, and in tones almost feminine; "I will take it, even if I must sacrifice a part of my patrimony! Consider the matter as settled!"

"And when will you come for it?" asked the dealer in antiques.

"Why," answered the other, "I must be frank with you; I shall not be in funds until the 27th or the 30th of April; but I am prepared to pay five hundred dollars down, and I will give as security for the remainder a certificate of stock on deposit with a trust company."

"And when will you pay me the five hundred and give me the paper?" asked Warford, eager to have done with the business.

"Why," said the young gentleman, "I will come in to-morrow afternoon; and on May first I will redeem the certificate."

"Very good," said Warford; "I am satisfied."

With blazing eyes and busy fingers the prospective owner handled the dagger for a few moments, and then with honeyed words and smooth promises took his leave.

Warford turned to the table where the dagger lay. Again he received an unmitigated shock. The great ruby had bled once more.

Red lines had dripped from the point of the weapon over the table — ominous lines, — for Warford was unaware that the fluid flowed from the hollow, valvular haft along the blade grooved like a serpent's fang.

With his face partly averted, Warford stared from the corners of his eyes at the bloody phenomenon. He was sure the great ruby answered his gaze with winks of devilish fire!

Just at this crisis, a slim, dark-complexioned, sad young man slipped into the shop from the street. He eyed the perturbed dealer in antiques with unobtrusive scrutiny, himself unobserved.

The dealer turned to a beautiful cupboard of oak, as black as

ebony. Hastily opening the door, he took out a flagon of brandy and a flint-glass goblet, and filling the latter to the brim, emptied it in a hurry. Then he turned his emboldened eyes on the crimson gem. It was lying sideways to the light, and he certainly thought that it glared back at him with all the fury of a living thing, and that the golden coils of the serpents moved and their green eyes blinked.

Aghast at the manifest strangeness of his lethal treasure, he sank down in an old arm chair, and closing his eyes, tried to collect his routed wits.

During this interval, a dark face, tragic, sadly smiling, looked in at the open door of the private office. It withdrew for a minute and reappeared. But (perhaps with the aid of garments pulled from Warford's hooks) a queer metamorphosis had taken place. A turban covered the head and a long Oriental robe swept to the floor. With a soft, gliding stride the figure walked in.

Warford heard the sound of footsteps and looked up. The visitant had moved to the table, taken the dagger in hand, and now stood gazing down at the dealer with rolling eyes.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried out Warford. "Who are you?"

"Old Victor Anselmo knew me," answered the Shape, "and so must thou! I am the Nabob of Pondicherry!"

"But I never heard of you before," declared Warford; "I protest I never did. Your presence alarms me!"

"You mentioned my name in a very familiar way within this very hour," responded the Nabob, severely; "you said this dagger had once been my property. Do you wonder that I have come to reclaim it?"

"I did not know what I was talking about," answered Warford; "I lied — I lied like one possessed!"

"Of course you did," assented the Nabob, "and that is precisely why I am here. You have been lying, I feel assured, ever since this dagger came into your hands. How many lies, for instance, did you tell to that unhappy old antiquary?"

"I can't count them now, I'm so confused," replied the miserable Warford; "but I do deeply regret every lie I have told. If you will instantly take your departure, I promise from this day forth to adhere to the truth like a faithful witness."

"We shall put that to the test at once," said the Nabob, assuming the aspect of a judge standing up full-robed to pronounce sentence. "Old Victor Anselmo lied about my dagger, you have lied, everybody that touches it lies ; I shall put your veracity to the supreme test — if you lie, you die ! What did you pay for it ?"

As the Nabob of Pondicherry asked this question, he stood over the wretched dealer in antiques and glared down at him with frightful significance. Alarmed by the awful menace of the apparition, Warford clapped his hands to his head in a panic of both mind and body, and almost shouted — "Seventy-five Cents!"

"What !" roared the Nabob. "Would you lie to me under the very stroke of Death ! How dare you say that you gave only seventy-five cents for my beautiful dagger ! You insult my occult and oriental pride ! You are devoid of truth and condemned by your own lips ! I must execute my threat !" So speaking, the Nabob raised the weapon aloft, and accompanied the motion with a horrible grimace.

"Oh, Sir ! I beg you to spare me ! I beg you to believe me !" cried the man of antiquities, with frantic energy. "For once in my life I have told the whole truth. Seventy-five cents was what I paid — if I die for it !"

The Nabob of Pondicherry made a magnificent salaam. He lifted the skirts of his robe for flight. "Farewell," said he, "The veracity of a dealer in antiques is beyond mortal or immortal belief. Instead of your life, I will take my dagger !"

And when the man of antiquities bestirred himself, as from a dream, he saw before him on the floor of his shop the sad reminders of the departed guest — a turban and a variegated gown.

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